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DIVISIONS OF:  
COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES  
CRIMINAL & JUVENILE JUSTICE PLANNING  
DEAF SERVICES  
LATINO AFFAIRS  
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES  
STATUS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS  
STATUS OF WOMEN  
STATUS OF ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDERS

## **History**

In 1999 the Iowa legislature directed the Department of Human Rights to conduct a study on persons of Asian Pacific Islander descent in Iowa. The study focused on areas of education, language development, employment, human rights, health, housing, and social welfare. The conclusion of the report suggested that the report “raised more questions than it answered” and that creation of a Commission would be beneficial not only to the Asian and Pacific Islander community, but to a “host of other interested parties, e.g. local leaders, state leaders, business and industry, educators, health care providers, and service organizations.”

In 2000, the Iowa legislature appropriated \$40,000 to the Department of Human Rights for the purpose of outreach and data base collection concerning the Asian Pacific Islander profile in Iowa. The Department of Human Rights issued a RFP and contracted with the State Public Policy Group to collect a database of resources, identify additional community leaders to involve, conduct community meetings and summit, and issue a final report. The report, “Vision of Asian Iowans: Collaboration, Commitment, and Contribution”, recommended three action steps:

1. Leaders need to come together to serve their specific communities in solidarity
2. Educate Iowans about issues facing Asian and Pacific Islander Americans living in Iowa
3. Take appropriate political action to ensure the creation of the Commission for Asian and Pacific Islander Americans within the Iowa Department of Human Rights

Legislation to establish a Commission on the Status of Iowans of Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage in the Department of Human Rights was introduced in 2000 and 2001. In 2002, Governor Vilsack established an Asian Pacific Islander Advisory Council to keep the administration apprised of issues of concern to Asian and Pacific Islander communities throughout the state. In 2004, SF2188 was passed by both the Senate and the House establishing the Commission on the Status of Iowans of Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage within the department of Human Rights effective July 1, 2004.

## **Commission**

The Commission consists of nine members appointed by the Governor and approved by the Senate. Each member serves a four-year term. However, four of the initial members appointed will only serve a two-year term. This will allow the members terms of office to be staggered. The Commission meets a minimum of four times per year.

## **Charges**

The Commission's duties are to:

- Advise the governor and legislature on issues confronting Asian and Pacific Islander persons in Iowa, including immigrants and refugees
- Advise the governor and legislature administrative and legislative changes needed to ensure access to benefits and services
- Make recommendations to the governor and legislature on needed revisions to the state's affirmative action program to increase the number of Asian and Pacific Islanders in the state's workforce
- Serve as a conduit to state government for organizations in Iowa
- Serve as a referral agency to assist in accessing state agencies and programs
- Serve as a liaison with federal, state, and local government, and private organizations
- Perform or contract for the performance of studies to address problems in the areas of education, employment, human rights, health, housing, social welfare, and other related areas
- Implement programs designed to solve problems
- Work with other state and federal agencies and organizations to develop small business opportunities and promote economic development
- Supervise development of a trade primer, outlining customs, cultural traditions, and business practices, including language usage for use by Iowa's export community
- Cooperate with other state and federal agencies and organizations to develop improved state trade relations with Asian and Pacific Islander countries
- Consult with state department and agencies on applications for federal funding that will have its primary effect on persons of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage
- Advise governor and director of revenue and finance on state agency budget requests that have primary effect on persons of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage

## **Commission Members**

Rita Arora – Iowa City

Thomas Baccam – Des Moines

Cyndi Chen – Des Moines

Chia Ning – Pella

Lin Ly – Burlington

Frank Osako – Cedar Rapids

Richard Park – Davenport

Dr. Cecelia Peralta – Fort Dodge

Barry Thongvanh – Storm Lake

## **FY04-05 Activities**

- Governor appointed nine members to the commission
- Hosted reception recognizing new Commission in the Department of Human Rights
- Conducted two Commission meetings; first as introduction to being a commissioner; second to organize commission activities
- Elected a chair, vice chair, and secretary of the commission
- Established electronic communications procedures between commissioners and department
- Established commission committees to complete activities

**FY05 Plans**

- Joining the divisions of Status of Women, Status of African Americans, and Latino Affairs in a legislative breakfast on February 8<sup>th</sup>
- Developing informational materials about the commission and the communities represented
- Developing a mission, strategic plan, annual agency plan, and proposed administrative rules
- Developing recommendations on how Iowa can support those effected by the Tsunami disaster
- Developing information for the commission's website
- Completing an annual report
- Networking with organizations and agencies across the state